

*Third National Research Symposium on Limited English Proficient Student Issues:*  
*Focus on Middle and High School Issues*

# **Applying Concepts of Marginality to Secondary ESL Programs: Challenges for Practitioners and Researchers**

**Mark A. Grey**

*University of Northern Iowa Department of Sociology and Anthropology*

## **Introduction**

In a recent publication (Grey, 1991), I suggested that secondary school English as a second language (ESL) programs must be understood within the social, cultural, and economic context of the school, community, region, and nation. I argued that understanding the context within which ESL programs work is crucial to determining whether these programs have become—or have the true potential to become—integral parts of school life, or whether they are assigned a different, possibly marginal status.

In the present paper I would like to expand on some of the points made in this initial work, make additional observations, and suggest some common themes. My intent is to suggest a given set of circumstances, but I do not necessarily claim the applicability of a general pattern. Further, I do not suggest that ESL programs that have actualized a goal of genuine integration in the larger school environment do not exist. Instead, my aim is to suggest factors that contribute to marginalization of ESL programs and their students and staff, and urge further research and reflection on this phenomenon.

## **Immigrants as Marginal People**

While Robert Park suggested that immigrants are marginal in his essay *Human migration and marginal man* (1928), Stonequist (1937) expanded on this concept in his book *The marginal man*. His notion that an individual suspended between two cultural realities is marginal results in difficulties in establishing an identity or, as more recent theorists might prefer, in avoiding cognitive dissonance.

The marginal person is poised in the psychological uncertainty between two (or more) social worlds; reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds...within which membership is implicitly if not explicitly based upon birth or ancestry...and where exclusion removes the individual from a system of group relations.  
(Stonequist, 1937, p. 8)

Subsequent interpretations of Stonequist's notion, however, have led to what Billson (1988) has referred to as the "term's lack of precision [that] has led to confusion and disparate usage" (1988, p. 183). Billson has submitted that the concept of "marginal man" has been transformed into three general categories: cultural marginality, social role marginality, and structural marginality (Billson, 1988, p. 184-185). The form and extent to which immigrant and refugee education programs fit into any of Billson's types poses a significant question to be answered with appropriate research, as I will suggest. For the moment, a brief overview of these categories of marginality will be helpful. Cultural marginality refers to

the process of cross-cultural contact and assimilation...[that] usually stems from a hierarchical valuation of two cultures in which an individual participates, so that relations between the two are commonly defined in terms of acceptance or rejection, belonging or isolation, in-group or out-group. (Billson, 1998, p. 184)

Social role marginality is "the product of failure to belong to a positive reference group" (Billson, 1988, p. 184) such as women entering specific careers (Aisenberg and Harrington, 1988; Bowker and Cox, 1982), female executives (Buono and Kamm, 1983), and amateurs (Stebbins, 1979). LEP students may characterize this type of marginality as well, particularly if they are not participating in the established activities and reward system of the school. The case of sports, for example, and their role as markers for immigrant assimilation will be discussed.

Structural marginality, in Billson's typology, "refers to the political, social and economic powerlessness of certain disenfranchised and/or disadvantaged segments within societies." This notion has been cross-bred with "conflict perspectives on oppression and exploitation to create contemporary conceptualizations of structural marginality" (1988, p. 185). One example of how LEP students fit into the realm of structural marginality—the demand for a labor underclass—will also be discussed.

Although Billson suggests macro-level processes of marginalization, Golden (1989) has rightfully argued that structural marginality can be found at the level of the institution as well. "Organizations and institutions by their nature tend to exclude people and bring about the alienation of human beings from one another" (1989, p. 5). Particularly germane to the present discussion, Golden submits that schools "can also be used to discriminate against and segregate people" (1989, p.5). As this paper suggests, school environments can significantly discriminate against ESL programs and their limited English proficient (LEP) students.

## A Developing Interest in Marginality

By briefly discussing how my own interest in this topic developed, I hope to encourage other researchers and practitioners to consider the status of ESL programs without limiting their contextual perspectives to the classroom or immediate school environment. My deliberations were motivated by research in Garden City, Kansas, High School that has been subsequently reported in other publications (Grey, 1990; Grey, 1992; Stull et al, 1990). The very name Garden City conjures up images of the All-American, Midwestern and predominately Anglo town. But the term in this case is inappropriate. Indeed, it was the many dramatic demographic changes that have taken place in the community that led my colleagues and me there. As part of the nationwide Ford Foundation Changing Relations Project, a team of five anthropologists and one geographer undertook nearly two years of ethnographic research to determine the state of relations between newcomers and established residents in Garden City (Stull et al., 1990; Stull, 1990) [1].

Although Garden City has had an established-resident Hispanic community since the turn of the century, it experienced rapid growth in its immigrant and refugee populations primarily after IBP, Inc. opened the world's largest beef packing plant nearby in 1980. Thousands of jobs that do not require English or other job skills attracted minorities and others from across the country. Garden City went from being bicultural (with Anglo and Hispanic populations) to multicultural with an influx of Southeast Asians and immigrant Latinos. With its total population growing by 6,000 (33 percent) between 1980 and 1985, Garden City was the fastest growing community in Kansas (Stull et al., 1990, p. 2).

School enrollments rose dramatically as well. From 1980 to 1986, the number of children enrolled in local

schools rose by nearly 1,600 (37 percent). By 1989, Hispanic students made up 29 percent of school enrollments and Southeast Asians 5 percent (Stull et al., 1990, p. 29). The influx of immigrant and refugee students increased demand for bilingual and ESL education. The ESL program in Garden City High School (GCHS) was a primary focus of my research.

Through extensive contact with school personnel and students, and intensive observation, I eventually realized that relations between the ESL program and its students and staff and the rest of the school community could not be explained simply by differences in cultural backgrounds and languages alone (Grey, 1990). Nor was it adequate to emphasize the role of personalities. Surely, the preconceptions and attitudes of key—usually administrative—personnel could explain aspects of the program's status, but they did not go far enough.

I then found myself turning my attention outward, beyond the school walls. The extent to which the high school reflected the economic and cultural realities of the surrounding community began to intrigue me and subsequently, I began to recognize a number of parallels. The realization that social processes in the school—particularly in terms of LEP students—were directly affected by processes at work in the larger community led me to contemplate the economic and other forces that governed ethnic relations at the community level. That schools reflect the realities of their communities is not a new notion, of course, but my consideration of GCHS was further refined with an examination of other factors—external and internal—that reinforced segregation and marginalization.

To define marginality, I have attempted to avoid simplistic functional or conflict theories for inequality, although both do seem to play a part. It is not enough to simply state that ESL programs like that in Garden City are inevitably marginal in light of the community's perceived need to concentrate quality education resources on a non-LEP group that will hold important roles in the future. Nor is it adequate to insist that marginality—as a component of stratification—is the inevitable result of denying ESL students the quality education necessary to better control their economic prospects.

Although both of these perspectives do influence the marginality of ESL programs, they are not adequate by themselves to explain the phenomenon. Marginality is not just the result of economic and cultural forces, but a process that changes as the factors affecting it change. This is why I am attempting to avoid description of a general pattern applicable to all programs: there isn't one.

Instead, my goal is to discern the various influences that contributed to the marginal status of the ESL program in GCHS and that have resulted from my subsequent consideration of this question concerning other programs. I will outline several of these influences and briefly address the implications of each, drawing primarily from previously published materials. Given the current debate surrounding the role and effectiveness of bilingual and ESL education in public schools, I hope to suggest that the debate be widened to consider the factors I outline.

### ***Influence 1: A lack of experience on the part of teachers and administrators***

Due to the relatively fast pace at which many ESL programs grow, how often have ESL programs been staffed with inappropriately or inadequately trained staff? Indeed many have been transferred from other departments that may or may not be related to ESL or bilingual education. Even though new teachers may have the will and genuine desire to serve LEP students, their lack of experience and/or training may ultimately contribute to poor or inappropriate instruction. Without adequate preparation for advancement

into mainstream classes—or at least marked improvement—these students and their inability to fit into mainstream classes contribute to the reputation of the program.

Administrators' own lack of previous experience with LEP populations contributes to and may even exacerbate problems associated with poor instruction. The unique problems and needs of ESL programs may be left inadequately addressed or left un confronted altogether due to a lack of experience and knowledge about these special programs and their students. The result is that ESL faculty and staff are too often left to make do with their own strategies that may themselves be hampered by a lack of experience.

Without clear direction and a lack of previous experience and knowledge, ESL programs like that in GCHS may become elaborate experiments. As I have already noted (Grey, 1991), however, these experiments often lack two essential components of serious experimentation that also damage the program. First, the experiment may lack "control." That is, an insufficient interest in consulting other school districts that have faced similar program growth can lead already inexperienced staff down uncertain paths of development. Indeed, a lack of a common theoretical base among the disparate communities faced with growing LEP populations—particularly in rural areas—may even prevent willing program administrations from knowing the most productive questions to ask their more experienced counterparts.

Secondly, in terms of the experimental nature of many ESL programs, how clearly have the program's goals and expectations been articulated and are they found in written form? Take, for example, the goals of programs in terms of transferring students from the sheltered environment of the ESL class to mainstream classes. What proficiency in English should these students have before being allowed to transfer? By extension, what proficiency must students have in order to graduate? ESL students in Garden City with reading levels at or below the third grade level, for example, were allowed to receive the same high school diploma as their English-proficient counterparts. This raises a number of serious ethical and logistical questions. But at minimum, I suggest that allowing LEP students to graduate with standard diplomas despite a low English proficiency does not provide mainstream teachers any incentive to assist ESL students in their language development, regardless of their personal willingness to do so. Indeed, without clearly articulated goals and expectations for ESL programs, how are willing mainstream teachers to know the best way to help LEP students?

## ***Influence 2: Assimilation as "Absorption"***

Assimilation is best defined as the process of "absorbing as one's own." Clearly, assimilation demands that the burden of change falls on alien peoples if they wish to become members of the dominate culture. Such a demand places any number of stresses on ESL programs. At base, it must be clearly recognized that LEP students are expected to undergo transformation, not the institution of the school or its "American" teachers or students. ESL programs may often be viewed as special—albeit institutional—accommodations for perceived resistance to assimilation. If this is the case, then their "special" status will in all likelihood contribute to their marginality.

Even with an insistence that immigrants assimilate, Gordon (1964) has noted that "Americans approve of cultural assimilation but [do] not want social assimilation" (quoted in Golden, 1989, p. 8). If this is the case, then Americans prefer that immigrants remain marginal to some extent.

Beyond this possible qualified acceptance of immigrants, a number of considerations point out that ESL programs retain a marginal status in light of required assimilation. First, the one-way transferal of students

from the ESL classroom into the mainstream--either academically or socially—is a fundamental expectation. How often do mainstream students seek interaction with LEP students in the ESL center? An important exception may be the so-called "buddy system," which links a willing mainstream student with an ESL counterpart to help him/her understand the functions of the school and perhaps even integrate them into social networks. But, as I have pointed out (Grey, 1991, p. 80), the emphasis on buddy systems is not on how the established student can learn more about immigrant backgrounds, but to guide the LEP student into the mainstream. Although these buddies may provide much needed personal support, their mission is assimilationist in intent.

Second, in terms of required assimilation, I point to the different status of foreign exchange students in relation to that of LEP immigrants and refugees. In my research, the status of exchange students *vís a vís* immigrants serves as a sort of useful shorthand to determine whether LEP students are integrated in any meaningful way. Allow me to point out a few important differences in these two groups' treatment. Exchange students are invited into the school, but immigrant and refugee students often appear without forewarning and because of external—usually economic—influences well beyond the control of school personnel. In addition, the presence of and interaction with exchange students is openly encouraged by the community, parents, and school administrators. Fundamentally, exchange students are introduced into the school to provide mainstream students with the opportunity to interact with them and provide (usually superficial) impressions of another culture. In this way, exchange students are encouraged to learn about American culture and participate in such school activities as, for example, competitions for homecoming queen or king. However, they are also encouraged to remain culturally unique. They and resident students are often reminded in public forums that they are different and that it is a privilege to have these foreign students in the school.

In contrast, immigrant and refugee students and their own unique cultural and life experiences are either ignored altogether or never publicly acknowledged. That exchange students usually come from middle or even elite classes in their home countries contrasts with the often poor or working class backgrounds of many immigrants. To me, one of the great tragedies of marginalizing immigrant and refugee students in secondary schools is the unwillingness of mainstream administrators, teachers, and students to recognize and acknowledge the courage and great suffering endured by so many of these students simply to have the opportunity to enroll in a school that mainstream students and teachers take for granted.

### ***Influence 3: The Role of Sports***

The role of athletics in ethnic relations in public schools warrants more attention. Only recently have researchers directly addressed sports and their function in shaping ethnic relations: Foley (1991), in Texas, and myself (Grey, 1992), in Garden City High School.

Numerous popular arguments submit that sports are valuable tools for assimilation or as an "homogenizing agent wherein ethnicity is inactive...a vehicle through which minority members can learn the value orientations of the dominant culture" (Allison, 1979, p. 53). However, we can no longer assume that sports necessarily have an assimilationist role. On the contrary, numerous researchers have reported the adoption of game forms that are changed to more closely reflect aspects of minority culture (Allison, 1982; Allison and Lueschen, 1979; Blanchard, 1974; Cochran, 1976).

Other popular arguments insist that sports work as a democratizing agents that encourage inter-ethnic and inter-class relations (Coleman, 1961). Indeed, development of sports clubs and teams favored by immigrants

and refugees is one way for the school to acknowledge and provide for the different sport interests of these groups. Also, the handful of LEP students who do participate in mainstream sports may gain entry into dominant social networks. However, I have found that quite the opposite is true and that sports actually work to alienate—and perhaps even marginalize—those who do not participate. This was particularly the case for immigrant, refugee, and other minority students in Garden City High School.

For many Garden City residents, participation in sports and their surrounding rituals is an indicator that students accept predominant cultural forms. In addition, the success of sports programs, particularly football, in Garden City was often directly linked with perceived prospects for successful academic years. Immigrant and refugee students are welcome to try out for sports teams or participate in other ways, but since very few do, they are often criticized for not being interested in becoming a part of established school life, or in a more general statement, of becoming members of our society on "American" terms (Grey, 1992).

Accommodation of immigrant and refugee students' sport interests were made in the years prior to my study. A high school soccer club was organized and most of the players were from the ESL program. However, the club was not recognized as a form of accommodation by most school personnel. Instead, it distracted from so-called "established" sports and did not reinforce what the community considered "American." The club was, however, noted for its value as an agent of assimilation. As the head football coach noted, the most positive aspect of the club was that students were required to speak English during practice and games (Grey, 1992, p. 263).

In this case, I contend that sports are gates through which few, if any, immigrant and refugee students are allowed to pass into predominant status groups and receive the implicit and explicit rewards of the school. I venture that this is the case in other schools as well.

Special sports teams for LEP students run into two problems that, in turn, marginalize the ESL program. First, these teams may be considered "nonestablished," immediately branding them out of the mainstream and, therefore, making them unacceptable to many in the school and larger community. Secondly, how can these special teams be justified for ESL students if the effort is not burdened with at least an implicit aim of assimilation? In either case, the status of the ESL program suffers due to its association with a marginal sport team.

#### ***Influence 4: A Lack of Empathy for Newcomers***

As a college instructor who teaches a non-Western cultures course, I have found this issue particularly interesting. With extensive experience traveling and living abroad, I can, on some level, empathize with the frustration and even anger felt by many immigrants and refugees. At least those teachers and administrators who have experienced submersion in an alien cultural and language can relate somehow to the newcomer's condition. Without a personally refined experience of immersion, however, there can be no genuine empathy with the plight of LEP students and, therefore, their condition is more readily dismissed.

Laura Carey (1989) explained this condition rather eloquently in her essay "On Alienation and the ESL Student." Her penetrating experience of alienation and estrangement in Spain while attempting to learn Spanish serves as an excellent example of how empathy led one ESL teacher to view her students differently. Her essay warrants extensive quotation.

I couldn't for the life of me picture myself in a social situation: the gawky American who says everything in the present tense, the woman with the vacant or puzzled look on her face, who

can come, go, have, or be but can't walk, run or laugh for lack of the appropriate verbs. What if they asked me a question? What if someone told me a funny joke, and I didn't laugh? What if it were a racist joke and I did laugh? And worse of all, what if I reached out to people, did my best to be warm and make a friend or two, and they turned away from me, embarrassed or impatient? What then? (Carey, 1989, p. 74)

It may not be enough for one to be "sensitive" (a term that is perhaps overused) to the immigrant; rather, one must be empathic. We must, however, recognize that most administrators and mainstream teachers have not had experiences like those of Ms. Carey and that the stress of life in a new country and culture for newcomers may remain inconsequential to them.

We must explore, however, whether an awareness of the LEP student's dilemma can be instilled in those who have no personal experience that allows them a degree of empathy. Certainly the "sensitivity" workshop has become commonplace for ESL practitioners and we have witnessed the development and marketing of a number of cross-cultural simulation games that can prove quite effective, at least in the short run. But to what extent are they available for other faculty and administrators? Indeed, to what extent *can* non-ESL staff be encouraged to participate without generating feelings that contribute to the program's marginality?

While these questions must be answered at the institutional level, the value of such training must be measured against the push and shove of bureaucratic constraints. Administrators can be made aware of the difficulties of life for immigrant and refugee students, but will their new awareness influence their decisions to staff ESL programs adequately in light of demands from other quarters?

### ***Influence 5: The Myth of the Melting Pot***

Despite a growing body of evidence to the contrary, the myth of the Melting Pot remains central to popular American culture. The myth is comfortable for most Anglos and one in which they even take great pride. It explains, for example, a common perceived lifestyle despite diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds among their European ancestors. It also works to rationalize a relatively strict code for assimilation that, of course, demands linguistic homogeneity. The myth provides its proponents with personal arguments for required assimilation of newcomers as well (they will remind us that their grandparents had to learn English so why can't more recent immigrants?). I have heard my own students make this argument more times than I care to count.

As Kopan (1974) points out, the term "melting pot" was popularized in Israel Zangwill's play of that name, that debuted in 1908, when European emigration to the United States was in full force. "*The melting pot* ran for months on Broadway, and its title was seized upon as a concise evocation of a profoundly significant American fact." However, contrary to more contemporary popular perspectives, response to *The melting pot* [in 1908] was as much one of relief as of affirmation, more a matter of reassurance that what had already taken place would turn out all right than encouragement to carry on in the same direction (Kopan, 1974, p. 46).

Today, in light of the very different national and ethnic origins of today's newcomers, the melting pot ideal seems to have taken on the role of defense against uncertainty, or in some cases, an extension of racist nativism.

The melting pot ideal is common in American schools, especially—in my experience—where different

ethnic and resident status groups find themselves together for the first time. In Garden City High School, for example, the principal used this very term as he described a volleyball game in which mainstream and newcomer refugee students participated. This annual event in which volleyball was played by boys who were coached by members of the varsity girls' volleyball team is an annual event similar to "powder puff" football in which girls take on roles of male football players (Grey, 1992). The principal seemed to take great pride in the interaction on the gym floor. He did not acknowledge the various ethnic backgrounds of the students—if he knew them at all. Nor did he mention how the different languages or degree of English proficiency could explain a previous or subsequent lack of interaction among the participants. His analogy of the melting pot was used instead in an assessment of the students' national origins and races. As he framed his argument, even established-resident Hispanic students were "Mexican" despite the fact that these students would in all likelihood not refer to themselves as such. Some might be recent descendants of Mexican nationals; however, the more likely they were to participate in established mainstream sports and activities, the less likely they were labeled in terms of national background.

This forms one example of how melting pot ideologies reinforce demands for assimilation. In schools, assimilationist attitudes that may be abstract in considerations of the larger society become concrete with specific targets: the ESL program and its students. As most members of the school community will uphold the melting pot ideal for the society, they will certainly insist on its actualization in their schools. If American society is characterized as a melting pot, then immigrant and refugee students must strive to melt into the dominant society as well. If we accept the notion that the school is a model and reflection of the larger society, it is unlikely that it will undergo sufficient transformation to incorporate the cultural diversity of newcomers, particularly those with limited English skills. The school is assumed and preferred to be a melting pot institution. It is not meant to diversify—accommodating the various linguistic and cultural interests of all students—but rather to maintain the status quo. Those programs that are perceived to hinder the assimilation process, or that seem unworthy (and perhaps expensive) accommodations of newcomer backgrounds, clearly challenge the melting pot and must, as a result, be conferred a marginal status.

### ***Influence 6: Implications of the English-Only Movement***

This particular factor seemed to indirectly influence the marginality of Garden City's ESL program, but in a more general sense, it influences all secondary ESL programs in some way. Whether the movement provokes marginality for these programs, however, must be understood in light of its relation to melting pot ideologies.

Although the so-called English-only movement *seems* ostensibly to conserve the melting pot ideal, the movement is in direct contradiction to the notion that the United States is a melting pot. It is argued, for example, that a common language maintains a strong nation. But as Bermudez (1989) correctly notes, reactions to multicultural/multilingual programs as contributions to "forces that imperil the future of our country" (Hayakawa, 1987, p. 36) are "the result of ethnocentric interpretations of cultural equilibrium that threatens our leadership status in the international arena" (Bermudez, 1989, p. 34). Indeed, we have already witnessed the decline of the American economy relative to those of Europe and Japan, in part, I believe, because of a lack of multilingual skills.

While the English-only movement seems to support the melting pot ideology, the drive for a monolingual society actually contradicts the melting pot in one important way. Crucial to the melting pot myth is that the process of melting into one society is *a voluntary act undertaken by its many participants* (Grey, 1991, p. 84). If the melting pot was and continues to exist, then voluntary participation would continue to be valued.



English-only would provide for one official or legal language that will constrain all people to acknowledge and fulfill the assimilationist expectations of the predominant culture.

Several scholars have noted that the drive for English-only is a reaction to apprehension about recent immigration patterns. Ironically, similar reactions were experienced during the early 1900s when the melting pot ideal became popular. Chen and Henderson (1986) have demonstrated how the contemporary fears about immigration of Latinos and Asians that translate into the form of the English-only movement are similar to the racist nativist reactions to immigration of Southern and Eastern Europeans between 1890 and 1914. Earlier immigrants from Western and Northern Europe "mingled quickly with native-born Americans and became assimilated." In contrast, "the 'new' immigrants from Italy, Russia, Hungary, and other countries were less intelligent, less willing to learn English, and did not intend to settle permanently in the United States" (Chen and Henderson, 1986).

Recent apprehensions about immigration have not only inspired the English-only movement, but also the fears of the establishment of so-called "language ghettos." These ghettos threaten the melting pot because they are populated by those who refuse to accept English as an expectation for life in the United States. With this notion in mind, how many times have practitioners and researchers been confronted with parallels drawn between developing language ghettos in the United States and French Quebec or, in light of more recent developments, the breakup of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The United States may experience a "Quebec" of its own, we are warned, if the proliferation of languages other than English are allowed to grow unfettered in such areas as the Southwest and southern California.

ESL programs without explicit goals to integrate linguistically their students into English-speaking society quickly add to this apprehension. Transitional bilingual education (TBE) programs that assure at least some element of native language assistance contribute to the development of language diversity and, therefore (at least indirectly), language enclaves. In any case, these TBE programs are not viewed as appropriate by proponents of English-only. On the contrary, the English-only drive reinforces the case for immersion and submersion approaches. Indeed, many proponents of English only would surely remove the "SL" from "ESL." English is not to be learned as a second language, but to *replace* the student's native language. Without their native language as reference to their native cultural or ethnic background, they are more assured to "melt" into the predominate culture.

### ***Influence 7: Demand for a Labor Underclass***

Occupations that employ members of the so-called labor underclass are usually characterized by low wages, poor or nonexistent benefits, part-time or flexible-time jobs in which there is no guarantee of the minimum number of hours worked, little or no job security, and, in many cases, a high risk of injury. Examples of these types of work include meat packing, asbestos removal, migrant farm labor, janitorial services, hotel cleaning, and restaurant work. Many of these occupations are held by LEP immigrants and other disenfranchised members of the population including the uneducated and unskilled. LEP immigrants "qualify" for employment of this type because of their lack of English skills that—regardless of other job skills—makes them ineligible for better jobs. While hundreds of American industries have moved to Mexico and other developing countries to take advantage of lower wages, there are some industries and services that cannot relocate. In particular, meat packing—the industry with which I am most familiar—has relocated to the source of livestock in the Midwest instead of sources of labor that forces recruitment of workers from other areas. Other services—such as janitorial and hotel work—are also place-specific and largely immobile.

Although increasing numbers of formerly middle-class job holders have been forced to take lower paying jobs, their numbers are insufficient to fill the jobs provided by these industries and services. Or, most well-educated, middle-class Americans simply refuse to accept this type of employment under the prevailing conditions. Previously untapped populations must now be approached to provide needed labor. In particular, minority women and LEP immigrants and refugees are filling these roles.

This form of a segmented labor force has existed in the United States for decades. The recruitment of LEP immigrants in such industries as meat packing has taken place at least as far back as when Upton Sinclair wrote *The jungle*. As a group of colleagues and I determined at a recent conference on the health and poverty of food processing workers, the situation for immigrants, refugees, and others in these industries has not significantly changed [2].

It is clearly to the advantage of these services and industries to maintain the availability of a segmented labor force, particularly among those who have no other real options for work because they are LEP. With this demand for a labor underclass, the role of ESL education becomes crucial. If the training is adequate and students are "graduated" with sufficient English skills to avoid the dubious job outlook of their more LEP peers, then ESL education contributes to the demise of this particular segmented labor source. However, ineffective ESL training directly contributes to the maintenance of this population, particular if—as in the case of Southeast Asian refugees—there are little or no opportunities to return to their home countries.

Marginalization of ESL education for economic motives moves beyond the largely philosophical or cognitive factors I have outlined. Instead, hard material consequences are involved. Given the demand for a segmented labor source, how conscious are proponents or critics of ESL education of its relation to either perpetuation or demise of a division of LEP labor?

Whether these relations constitute class or caste poses important questions for researchers and practitioners. To work with assumptions that ESL programs play no part in these processes is potentially detrimental to the goals of ESL training. As Spener correctly points out,

Educational policy can serve to reinforce caste distinctions in the society by providing, more or less intentionally, non-white people with an inferior education. In doing so, the educational system plays a role in creating a pool of adults who are "qualified" to be economically exploited, unemployed or underemployed (Spener, 1988, p. 149-150).

Well conceived ESL programs—with explicit goals for advancing the interests of their students—counter the perpetuation of this "qualified" labor source and allow students genuine opportunities for further education and career development.

## A Common Theme?

Do any common themes that emerge from the various influences I have suggested contribute to marginalized ESL programs? Although I did not coin the phrase, I believe the concept of "maximum uncertainty" (Hackenberg, 1988) may be useful in our reflection on this condition. At base, we must ask ourselves if reactions that marginalize ESL programs are a result of apprehension about the pace and depth of change we are experiencing in our society today. "Maximum uncertainty" refers not only to social, cultural, and economic change taking place today but also to the relative unpredictability of the future. If

popular forecasts for the future are based on conditions of the present, the tumult we experience today only makes us apprehensive about the future and the degree and frequency of change we will experience. I often predict for my students that their generation will experience change unparalleled in the three previous generations combined. It is a notion with which most are obviously uncomfortable.

Still, so-called traditional lifestyles comfort us and the future is a much more comfortable unknown if the present remains stable. It is not of course, and while people grasp for stability and the "traditional," unavoidable uncertainty about the present breeds apprehension about the future. While change itself is stressful, maximum uncertainty creates an environment of stress in which there are fewer and fewer common references for consolation.

Clearly the continuation of the melting pot ideal is comforting in the face of uncertainty, particularly as Anglos (and others) confront an increasingly diverse population. ESL and bilingual education challenge the relative certainty associated with the melting pot because they are viewed as accommodations to and, therefore, legitimizations of, diversity. These programs, then, contribute to growing uncertainty and the apprehension that results.

In addition, ESL programs confuse the points of reference for determination of caste and class. Despite popular concepts of middle-class life as an achievement of generations' successful adaptation to the United States—regardless of the families' original ethnic, national, or linguistic backgrounds—to what extent were these achievements based on school-born language training? ESL education in public schools provides a short cut for more recent newcomers, an advantage that many no doubt view as unfair or inappropriate. With this attitude, marginalization of ESL or bilingual education is inevitable.

Contrasting public school ESL programs with private and postsecondary programs presents another common theme. While the former are publicly funded and provided by legal or policy mandate, the latter programs are "market driven"; that is, ESL training is purchased with the explicit goal of (quickly) improving the client's English proficiency. Inefficient programs must make adequate adjustments or they are forced to fold. Whether this training is for business purposes (as is the case for most private programs) or for admission into academic programs, these programs are legitimized by their mission. In contrast, to what extent do public school programs reflect market forces and deny the importance of individual incentives for progress toward proficiency?

## Implications for Practitioners

The potential marginal status of ESL programs must be understood within the context of a number of economic, social, and cultural factors. Some of these factors have been outlined and discussed in this essay. What are some of the implications of this discussion for ESL practitioners?

First, practitioners must look beyond the walls of their classrooms and schools to understand the conditions under which they work. While no education is neutral, ESL instruction is particularly vulnerable to the political, social, and economic winds of change. While the vast majority of ESL instructors and aides are dedicated to their students, there are other forces that ultimately dictate the nature of their relationship.

While many of these factors are beyond the control of practitioners, some can be addressed institutionally. For example, I encourage serious examination of program goals and expectations. Once they have been established, make them clear to your students, fellow (mainstream) faculty, and administrators. Make it

clear how interested faculty can assist LEP students, offer suggestions, and provide materials. These policies should be written and widely distributed to students and their parents upon enrollment. Translate these documents into home languages as appropriate. Too often, as was the case in Garden City High School, only disciplinary documents were provided in languages other than English.

Another institutional issue to address that is related to ESL program goals is the use of standards for graduation. Given the tremendous variety of students in terms of languages, prior academic experience, and age, the rules that govern mainstream student flows do not apply in the ESL classroom. But the challenge of overwhelming diversity must not be used to justify indifferent or dubious practices. Determine and make explicit the types of diplomas available and the standards students will be expected to meet in order to obtain them. This poses difficult ethical and philosophical issues for practitioners—particularly in light of the life difficulties for newcomers—but bridging the gap between uncertain program direction and the realities of the post-graduation market must be attempted or LEP students will not benefit from this training as much as they should. Do not deny your link with the marketplace and the types of labor forces you may be (unwittingly) contributing to.

This discussion also introduces concern about the relationship between practitioners and researchers. While many practitioners appreciate the guidance of researchers, in my experience, the relationship is often driven by teachers' hopes and expectations that the researcher will act as a conduit between the ESL staff and administrators. They may also hope that the researcher will use his/her findings to further the agenda of instructors and aides. While marginalized programs often do suffer from a lack of advocacy, practitioners should not rely on researchers to do their endorsement for them unless that is a specific agreement of their interaction.

This relationship between practitioners and researchers may, on the other hand, be one of animosity. At a recent conference, I was reminded of this type of relationship not only between researchers and educators, but with health and other service providers as well. Researchers are often suspected of having self-serving aspirations. Although it apparently is not always made clear how research can benefit service providers and clients personally, quality research is necessary to form appropriate policy that will more deeply affect client populations in the aggregate.

## Implications for Researchers

I submit that further research must be undertaken in order to determine the effects of the conditions outlined here on secondary ESL programs throughout the country. In addition, we must determine what other factors contribute to marginal status. It is my hope that the factors I have discussed will serve as a springboard for more extensive and detailed study. There are a number of preliminary questions (Grey, 1991, p. 86-87):

1. Do any of these factors of marginality change with enrollment patterns in terms of ethnic, national or linguistic backgrounds?
2. How do these conditions change—or remain the same—between rural and urban settings? Do they differ with school size?
3. What effects do *local* economic patterns have on LEP education policy? By extension, what is the nature of the local job and other opportunity markets that ESL graduates will enter?

4. What are the particular manifestations of macro- and micro-level policies and influences on LEP education programs? Are there any patterns that develop over time, under similar local conditions, and among similar ethnic groups?

5. How do individual schools and/or programs react to these conditions? To what extent are policies changed in response to recognition of marginalization? How do students respond?

6. Which of Billson's three categories of marginality best fit ESL programs in different circumstances? Can one particular category explain marginal status better than others?

While some of these influences can be addressed institutionally, most of the factors are external in nature. All contribute—in different applications and to different degrees—to a context within which secondary ESL programs are likely to have a marginal status. While this essay attempts to speculate about marginality and articulate some of the components of this condition, clearly comprehensive research is necessary to develop an understanding of the phenomenon. In response to this research, we must develop appropriate policy that will improve the status of ESL education and, therefore, the status of program personnel and their students. Without answering this challenge, immigrant and refugee education cannot improve to provide the level of quality that LEP students deserve.

## Notes

1. Garden City, Kansas, was one of six sites selected for the Changing Relations Project; it was the only rural setting included in the project.

2. Ford Foundation/Aspen Institute Conference "New Factory Workers in Old Farming Communities: Costs and Consequences of Relocating Meat Industries." Aspen Institute. Wye Conference Center, Queenstown, Maryland, April 12-14, 1992.

## References

- Aisenberg, N., and Harrington, M. (1988). *Women in academe: Outsiders in the sacred grove*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Allison, M. T. (1979). On the ethnicity of ethnic minorities in sport. *Quest*, 31, 50-56.
- Allison, M. T. (1982). Sport, ethnicity and assimilation. *Quest*, 34, 165-175.
- Allison, M. T., and Lueschen, G. (1979). A comparative analysis of Navajo and Anglo basketball systems. *International Review of Sport Sociology*, 3-4, 76-86.
- Billson, J. M. (1988). No owner soil: The concept of marginality revisited on its sixtieth birthday. *International Review of Modern Sociology*, 18 (Autumn), 183-204.
- Bermudez, A. B. (1989). Examining education barriers to Hispanic education. *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, 4, 31-40.
- Blanchard, K. (1974). Basketball and the culture-change process: The Rimrock Navajo case. *Council on*

*Education and Anthropology Quarterly*, 5 (4), 8-13.

Bowker, L. H., and Cox, F. M., (1982). Sociologists in schools of social work: Marginality or integration? *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 9 (2), 220-232.

Buono, A. F., and Kamm, J. B., (1983). Marginality and the organizational socialization of female managers. *Human Relations*, 12, 1125-1140.

Carey, L. (1989). On alienation and the ESL student. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 71 (1), 74-75.

Chen, E. M., and Henderson, W. (1986). New "English-only" movement reflects old fear of immigrants. *Civil Liberties*, (358), 6.

Cochran, R. (1976). Folk elements in a non-folk game: The example of basketball. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 10, 399-403.

Coleman, J. S. (1961, November). Athletics in high school. *Annals of the American Society of Political and Social Science*, 33-43.

Foley, D. E. (1990). The great American football ritual: Reproducing race, class and gender inequality. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 7, 111-135.

Golden, J. (1989). Marginal man—Alive and well. *Teaching*, 1 (2), 4-11.

Gordon, M. M. (1964). *Assimilation in American life: The role of race, religion and national origins*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Grey, M. A. (1992). Sports and immigrant, minority and Anglo relations in Garden City, Kansas, high school. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 9 (3) 255-270.

Grey, M. A. (1991). The context for marginal secondary ESL programs: Contributing factors and the need for further research. *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, 9 (Fall), 75-89.

Grey, M. A. (1990). Immigrant students in the heartland: Ethnic relations in Garden City, Kansas, high school. *Urban Anthropology*, 19 (4), 409-427.

Hackenberg, R. A., (1988). Scientists or survivors? The future of applied anthropology under maximum uncertainty. In R. T. Trotter (Ed.), *Anthropology for tomorrow: Creating practitioner-oriented applied anthropology programs*. Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association.

Hayakawa, S. I. (1987). Make English official: One common language makes our nation work. *The Executive Educator*, 9 (1), 36.

Kopan, A. T. (1974). Melting pot: Myth or reality? In G. E. Epps (Ed.), *Cultural Pluralism*. Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing.

Park, R. (1928, May). Human migration and marginal man. *American Journal of Sociology*, 33, 881-893.

Spener, D. (1988). Transitional bilingual education and the socialization of immigrants. *Harvard*

*Educational Review*, 58 (2),133-153.

Stebbins, R. A. (1979). *Amateurs: On the margin between work and leisure*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Stonequist, E. V. (1937). *The marginal man: A study in personality and culture*. New York: Scribners.

Stull, D. D. (Ed.) (1990). Special issues: When the packers came to town: Changing ethnic relations in Garden City, Kansas. *Urban Anthropology*, 19 (4), 303-427.

Stull, D. D., Broadway, M., Benson, J., Campa, A., Erickson, K., and Grey, M. A. (1990). *Changing relations: Newcomers and established residents in Garden City, Kansas*. Report No. 172. Lawrence: University of Kansas, Institute for Public Policy and Business Research.